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Letter dated 8 March 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to Security Council resolution 2305 (2016), in which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) until 31 August 2017 and, bearing in mind the strategic priorities and recommendations identified by my predecessor in his letter of 12 March 2012 (S/2012/151) as a result of the strategic review of UNIFIL, expressed the need for a follow-up and update, requesting that I conduct, by February 2017, a strategic review of UNIFIL, examining the structure of its uniformed and civilian components and related resources in an effort to ensure that the Mission is configured most appropriately to fulfil its mandated tasks. The scope of the strategic review did not include the mandate of the Mission or its authorized maximum strength of 15,000 troops, as specified in resolution 1701 (2006).

In accordance with resolution 2305 (2016), and following consultations with the parties, Security Council members and countries contributing troops to UNIFIL and to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, and pursuant to desk reviews prepared by UNIFIL in close consultation with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, a multidisciplinary team from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support visited UNIFIL from 15 to 22 January 2017. The team met with officials in Lebanon and Israel, United Nations entities, representatives of troop-contributing countries and ambassadors of the permanent members of the Security Council. The Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, El-Ghassim Wane, led the review team, which included representatives from the Offices of Operations and Military Affairs, the Policy, Evaluation and Training Division and the Department of Field Support. A military capability study of UNIFIL was conducted from 18 to 26 January 2017, and was informed by the strategic review.

The strategic review took place during a period of political progress in Lebanon, with the election of President Michel Aoun, the appointment of Prime Minister Saad Hariri and the formation of the new Government, albeit within an overall context of uncertainty, not least as a result of the ongoing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Notwithstanding the calm and stability that continue to prevail across the Blue Line, there has been no tangible progress towards a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution, as called for in resolution 1701 (2006). More than 10 years after the adoption of that resolution, the main causes of the conflict remain largely unaddressed. It is the responsibility of Lebanon and Israel to fulfil their respective obligations under the resolution.

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The imperative remains for continued efforts to ensure that the area between the Blue Line and the Litani River is free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL. The Government of Lebanon must make good on its pledge to increase its involvement, and that of its ministries and security institutions, in the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), and its presence in southern Lebanon, thereby further extending the authority of the State in the south. This includes expanding the capacity and presence of the Lebanese Armed Forces in southern Lebanon and in the territorial waters of Lebanon.

Intrusions into Lebanese airspace by Israel continue unabated, in violation of Lebanese sovereignty and resolution 1701 (2006). These almost daily overflights run counter to the efforts of UNIFIL to reduce tensions and have a negative impact on the credibility of the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL. The continued occupation by the Israel Defense Forces of the northern part of the village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line also constitutes a continuing violation of resolution 1701 (2006). Israel must cease those violations.

During the review, both parties emphasized their continued commitment to implementing resolution 1701 (2006) and maintaining stability along the Blue Line. Both parties also agreed on the importance of UNIFIL and the need to maintain the composition and deployment of the Mission, including its Maritime Task Force, at its present strength, in its area of operations. Lebanon and Israel continue to approach any adjustment to the capabilities, structure or activities of the Mission with strong caution, emphasizing that, in the current climate of uncertainty, the focus should be on minimizing risks.

The team reviewed the progress of the strategic dialogue between the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL and the ways in which its pace could be accelerated. The strategic dialogue is a means not only to strengthen the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces to assume greater security responsibilities in southern Lebanon and in Lebanese territorial waters, but also to facilitate movement towards a permanent ceasefire. Since 2012, demands on the Lebanese Armed Forces have not subsided; on the contrary, they have increased. The Lebanese Armed Forces continue to face multiple security challenges, particularly along the northern and eastern borders of the country. As a result of this situation, the Lebanese Armed Forces maintain only two reduced-strength brigades in the area south of the Litani River. Consequently, the presence of the most visible aspect of Lebanese State authority in southern Lebanon has not increased as expected.

The review acknowledged that, through the strategic dialogue, in coordination with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon and building on previous efforts of the International Support Group for Lebanon, UNIFIL supports the efforts of the Government of Lebanon to increase the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces to carry out the tasks mandated in resolution 1701 (2006), including by mobilizing resources for prioritized needs identified by the Lebanese Armed Forces. In that connection, the review encouraged UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces to further study and develop the possibility of establishing a "model brigade" dedicated to the sector south of the Litani River in the UNIFIL area of operations as a concrete step towards enhancing the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces in the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). At the same time, the review recognized the importance for the Government of Lebanon and the Lebanese Armed Forces of assuming accountability and responsibility in that regard.

The review reconfirmed the essential function of the liaison and coordination arrangements that UNIFIL has established with the parties, bilaterally and through the tripartite mechanism, in deconflicting situations and defusing tensions, as well

as enhancing cooperation and building trust. A key objective of the engagement of UNIFIL with the parties continues to be to assist the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces in finding mutually agreeable security arrangements and agreeing on confidence-building measures to reduce the potential for tension or incidents, in particular in sensitive areas along the Blue Line. This includes the continued efforts that UNIFIL is making with the parties to mark the Blue Line visibly on the ground.

The review determined that, overall, the Force was well configured to implement its mandated tasks. UNIFIL continues to be a credible, flexible and mobile force. The deterrence effect of the high density of UNIFIL troops within the area of operations, coupled with the more than 400 daily operational activities, including ground and aerial patrols, checkpoints and observation tasks, contributes to security and stability in the area. While the relationship between UNIFIL and the local population continues to be positive overall, isolated incidents, some of them serious, have at times affected the freedom of movement of UNIFIL. I have urged the Lebanese authorities to continue to cooperate with UNIFIL to guarantee adequate protection of the peacekeepers, as well as their freedom of movement throughout the area of operations.

The review noted the important role of the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force in providing training for and in supporting the naval branch of the Lebanese Armed Forces to prevent the unauthorized entry by sea of arms or related materials into Lebanon through maritime interdiction operations. By enabling a stable and safe maritime environment, the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force not only contributes to enhanced maritime trade, but also deters the use of Lebanese territorial waters for illicit purposes and mitigates the spillover effects of the regional crises across the Mediterranean.

The review assessed the impact of the different community outreach activities of UNIFIL, including those funded by some of the national contingents of UNIFIL and those funded through the assessed Mission budget in the form of quick-impact projects and strategic communication activities. Quick-impact projects are intended to strengthen links between UNIFIL and local communities and address some of the most pressing needs of the population. They also serve to harmonize the engagement of the Mission with local communities in line with the priorities of the national authorities. Through quick-impact projects, the Mission seeks to ensure the equitable geographical distribution of its community outreach activities.

In the review, it was determined that the strategic priorities identified in the strategic review of 2012 remained largely valid but needed to be adapted to take into account the evolving regional dynamics and internal context in Lebanon. It was recognized that failure to meet the political objectives of resolution 1701 (2006), namely a permanent ceasefire and long-term solution to the conflict, increasingly puts at risk the relative calm achieved in southern Lebanon and along the Blue Line. Importantly, there is a need for continued United Nations advocacy efforts and engagement with political and military interlocutors in Lebanon and Israel, through the good offices of the Special Coordinator for Lebanon and the Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNIFIL, in ensuring that the cessation of hostilities is preserved and progress is made towards a permanent ceasefire. In this regard, concerted engagement with the international community continues to be essential to foster support for increasing the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces and to extend the authority of the State in the south.

At the same time, the updated strategic priorities reflect a heightened emphasis on prevention, including through the presence of UNIFIL and its operational and non-operational activities, in an effort to mitigate risks in a timely manner, thereby

preventing small incidents from escalating into larger-scale violence. In this regard, the review recognized the importance of UNIFIL continuing to take steps, however incremental, to create the space to enable the parties to move from the fragile cessation of hostilities to a permanent ceasefire. I am encouraged by the continued willingness of the parties to engage with UNIFIL in taking practical and constructive measures to maintain calm and to ensure stability. Although UNIFIL has identified no imminent threat of physical violence against civilians, the review also addressed the need to ensure operational preparedness, in particular as it pertains to the Mission's civilian protection mandate.

The strategic review has identified the following three strategic priorities in the implementation of the mandate of UNIFIL:

(a) UNIFIL, in close coordination with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon and the United Nations country team, should further promote an integrated and comprehensive approach to the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) in order, among other things, to:

(i) Support the efforts of the Government of Lebanon in increasing its involvement, and that of its ministries and security institutions, in the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), and its presence in southern Lebanon, thereby further extending the authority of the State in the south;

(ii) Support the efforts of the Government of Lebanon to increase the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces and its presence in southern Lebanon and the territorial waters of Lebanon at an accelerated pace, particularly in relation to prioritized land and maritime capabilities, through the strategic dialogue between the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL and through the advocacy work of the International Support Group for Lebanon, as appropriate, not only as a prerequisite for the gradual assumption of effective and sustainable security control of the UNIFIL area of operations and Lebanese territorial waters, but also as a key element to supporting steps towards a permanent ceasefire;

(b) UNIFIL should undertake all necessary preventive actions to maintain calm along the Blue Line and in its area of operations, including as a means to build confidence between the parties and contribute to creating conditions conducive to moving from the cessation of hostilities to a permanent ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel;

(c) Without prejudice to the responsibilities of the parties, and in accordance with its mandate, UNIFIL should have contingency plans in place and be prepared to implement its mandate effectively and safely in extreme situations and, in particular, to deliver on its mandated responsibility to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence, within its means and capabilities.

The overall strategic political guidance is to maintain the current strength, composition and configuration of UNIFIL. This notwithstanding, the strategic review, in line with its terms of reference and in pursuit of the aforementioned strategic priorities, made a number of recommendations to ensure that UNIFIL may fulfil its mandated tasks optimally, while maintaining its operational effectiveness on land, in the air and at sea. Through the strategic review, a number of potential efficiency gains have been identified. A summary of recommendations is attached to the present letter (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter and its annex to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) António **Guterres**

Annex to the letter dated 8 March 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

Summary of recommendations

Protection of civilians

1. Bearing in mind the primary responsibility of the host State for protection, liaison arrangements for protection contingency planning should be established with the Government of Lebanon, as well as with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon and relevant United Nations country team partners.

2. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) should build upon progress achieved in its contingency planning for the protection of civilians by extending planning to the sector and unit levels and conducting frequent rehearsals and logistics preparation, with a view to ensuring the commitment of troop-contributing countries to execute such plans and implement the mandate of UNIFIL to protect civilians, should the situation warrant it.

Strategic dialogue mechanism

3. In line with the Capability Development Plan of the Lebanese Armed Forces, the strategic dialogue plan and, as appropriate, building on previous coordination efforts of the International Support Group for Lebanon, the strategic dialogue between the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL should prioritize the needs that the Forces have put forward to build their capacity on land and at sea, namely:

(a) A "model brigade" of the Lebanese Armed Forces in the UNIFIL area of operations;

(b) Naval assets (offshore patrol vessel);

(c) A Lebanese Armed Forces regional civil-military cooperation centre in the south in the UNIFIL area of operations.

4. Through the strategic dialogue, UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces should establish a series of benchmarks and timelines, with a view to developing further the "model brigade" concept and ensuring its sustainability in terms of staffing, equipment, training, bases and resources. This would maximize the capacity of existing Lebanese Armed Forces personnel in the UNIFIL area of operations, as well as increase the presence of the Lebanese Armed Forces south of the Litani River. The brigade would facilitate closer joint operations, as UNIFIL would provide "advise and assist" teams at various echelons to mentor leaders in the Lebanese Armed Forces.

5. Through their strategic dialogue, the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL should establish a series of benchmarks and timelines, with a view to establishing a dedicated cadre of trained and experienced naval personnel who, through continuous training, would be able to assume the role of trainers.

6. UNIFIL, in consultation with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, should consider how best to mobilize support for developing the land and sea capabilities identified as priorities by the Lebanese Armed Forces, including the possibility of organizing a donors' conference in follow-up to the Ministerial Conference on International Support for the Lebanese Armed Forces, held in Rome in June 2014, as well as establish a system to track progress in capacity-building in relation to tasks mandated in resolution 1701

(2006) and ensure the accountability and responsibility of the Government of Lebanon and the Lebanese Armed Forces in that regard.

7. In an effort to promote, facilitate and accelerate the pace of resource mobilization for the prioritized needs identified by the Lebanese Armed Forces and in order to avoid duplication of effort, UNIFIL should continue to cooperate with the Executive Military Commission, which is co-chaired by the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, on the coordination of multi-donor assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces.

8. The UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander should retain overall political direction and oversight of the strategic dialogue process, which is currently coordinated by the Deputy Force Commander. In an effort to bolster and broaden access by the Force to the international diplomatic and donor community, including troop-contributing countries, in close coordination with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon and in line with the strategic priority to ensure an integrated approach to support capacity-building in the Lebanese Armed Forces, it is recommended that UNIFIL, under the overall guidance of the Head of Mission and Force Commander, enhance the engagement of the Deputy Head of Mission and its civilian substantive component in the strategic dialogue.

Liaison and coordination with the parties

9. All assets should be synchronized and synergy between the UNIFIL Liaison Branch, sector forces and the Observer Group Lebanon of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization should be ensured, with a view to fully utilizing all capabilities, especially as first responders to incidents.

10. The UNIFIL Liaison Branch should be strengthened, within existing resources, including for deployment south of the Blue Line.

11. In order to enhance the current level of liaison and allow for a strategic dialogue with the Israel Defense Forces and other Israeli authorities on issues relating to the UNIFIL mandate, the establishment of an office in Tel Aviv, agreed by the Government of Israel in February 2007, remains of critical importance for UNIFIL.

Structure of the uniformed and civilian components of UNIFIL

Land forces

12. Ways to enhance further the coverage and effectiveness of coordinated operations between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces should be explored.

13. Notwithstanding the overall strategic political guidance to maintain the current strength, composition and configuration of UNIFIL land forces, a troop-to-task analysis conducted as part of the military capability study of UNIFIL identified a number of recommendations to ensure that UNIFIL may fulfil its mandated tasks optimally.

14. Priority should be given to the work of the Contingent-Owned Equipment/Memorandum of Understanding Management Review Board in order to realize efficiencies.

Maritime Task Force

15. The overall strategic political guidance is to maintain the operational effectiveness of the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force. Following this guidance, a ship-to-task analysis conducted as part of the military capability study of UNIFIL

identified a number of recommendations to ensure greater efficiency in the way the Maritime Task Force fulfils its mandated tasks:

(a) The UNIFIL Maritime Task Force should be gradually reconfigured to comprise an all corvette fleet. The adjustment would entail phasing out one offshore patrol vessel/fast patrol boat and replacing another such vessel with a corvette, thus resulting in a stronger reconfigured fleet of six corvettes. The envisioned reconfiguration could take place by the end of 2018, with the expectation that partners would be able to help the naval branch of the Lebanese Armed Forces to improve its capacity, including through the acquisition of an offshore patrol vessel that would be pursued via the strategic dialogue mechanism and the International Support Group for Lebanon, as appropriate;

(b) The flight hours of the two UNIFIL Maritime Task Force helicopters should be reduced from 45 hours to 25 hours per month, commensurate with their actual use;

(c) The total maximum number of maritime crew personnel across the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force, including the Maritime Task Force headquarters, should be reduced from 1,200 to 900.

16. Ways to enhance the effectiveness of coordinated operations between UNIFIL and the naval branch of the Lebanese Armed Forces should be explored, including by increasing the continuous presence of the naval forces at sea to 72 hours per week and strengthening the reliability of the Coastal Radar Organization stations in conducting maritime interdiction operations.

Community outreach activities

17. In support of the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and the Mission's strategic priorities, UNIFIL community outreach activities should be directed at: promoting good relations between the Mission and local communities and ensuring the protection and freedom of action of the Mission; the full deployment and effective control of the Lebanese Armed Forces in southern Lebanon; and supporting the efforts of the Government of Lebanon to increase its involvement in the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and its presence in southern Lebanon, thereby further extending the authority of the State in the south.

18. To ensure that community outreach is planned and implemented as a Mission-wide activity, UNIFIL engagement should be structured along two interrelated lines of action under the day-to-day management of the Deputy Head of Mission: outreach and programmatic activities (cost and no-cost); and strategic communications.

19. To strengthen the coherence and effectiveness of its community outreach and programmatic efforts, it is recommended that UNIFIL establish a community outreach board that would be led by the Deputy Head of Mission and comprise: the military Chief of Staff, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and the civil affairs, J9, civil-military cooperation and sector commanders, to ensure that:

(a) Annual priorities and criteria of the Mission are established to direct all community outreach and programmatic activities (cost and no-cost) to meet the objectives listed above;

(b) Community outreach and programmatic activities of the Mission are culturally sensitive and distributed equitably across the area of operations;

(c) Programmatic activities are undertaken in close consultation with municipal or central institutions of the Government of Lebanon and, where feasible and appropriate, under their visible leadership;

(d) Opportunities are identified to coordinate or engage, where relevant and appropriate, the Lebanese Armed Forces in the delivery of programmatic activities;

(e) Programmatic activities are coordinated with the country team and other stakeholders to avoid duplication and, where possible, ensure synergy;

(f) The impact of UNIFIL community outreach efforts is assessed regularly, including through the establishment of a common Mission database, systematic joint evaluations of all community outreach activities and the conduct of public opinion surveys.

20. To strengthen the contribution of community outreach activities to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), and specifically the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces throughout the south, UNIFIL, where relevant and appropriate, should engage the Lebanese Armed Forces in the implementation of the Mission's programmatic activities. Should the Government of Lebanon establish a regional civil-military cooperation centre in the south, it should be the focal point for the planning and organization of coordinated or joint community outreach activities.

21. UNIFIL should continue to maintain an annual budget for quick-impact projects of $500,000 for the next two to three years. Those projects should ensure balance in the geographical distribution of activities and be in conformity with the national priorities and plans of the Government of Lebanon. Priority should be given to coordinated or joint civil-military cooperation activities with the Lebanese Armed Forces. Consideration should be given to quick-impact projects co-funded with municipal or central authorities.

22. To strengthen the impact of community outreach activities, the UNIFIL Civil Affairs Section should prioritize: liaison and engagement with key Government of Lebanon ministries and security institutions, in coordination with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon and the country team; and the monitoring and assessment of and reporting on community outreach activities of the Mission, in addition to ongoing engagement with local communities in the south.

23. In support of enhanced assessment of the impact of community outreach activities, public opinion surveys managed by the Civil Affairs Section could be streamlined to enable more agile and regular surveys, the analysis of which could contribute to the planning and delivery of community outreach activities.

24. To strengthen coordination of civil-military cooperation activities, the Force Commander's Civil-Military Cooperation Unit should be tasked by the J9 branch and report to the military Chief of Staff through the Chief of J9, with responsibility for supporting the planning, implementation, delivery and evaluation of programmatic activities at the sector level.

25. To strengthen the coherence and delivery of UNIFIL strategic communications, the Military Community Outreach Unit should be reduced from 55 to 25 personnel and merged with the Public Information Office to establish a Mission Strategic Communications Unit, to be staffed by personnel from at least three troop-contributing countries and headed by a P-5 staff member (the current Chief of the Public Information Office), who would report to the Deputy Head of Mission.

26. Further to the implementation in full, over a three-year period, of the recommendations of the 2013 civilian staffing review, UNIFIL should continue to optimize its staffing complement and resources to support the effective and cost-efficient implementation of its mandate and, in this regard, make relevant proposals for the 2018/19 and 2019/20 budgets.

Mission integration and coordination

27. Establish a civilian Chief of Staff in the Office of the Head of Mission and Force Commander, within existing resources, at the D-1 level to strengthen the integration and coordination of the Mission.